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## FALSE METHODS OF INTERPRETATION.

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### I. FALSE TYPOLOGY.

In a little commentary on Leviticus, published in this country by F. H. Revell, Chicago, 1861, is to be found the following language :

"All these things belonged to the burnt-offering phase of our blessed Lord, and to that alone, because, in it, we see Him offering Himself to the eye, to the heart, and to the altar of Jehovah, without any question of imputed sin, of wrath, or of judgment. In the sin offering, on the contrary, instead of having, as the great prominent idea, what Christ is, we have what sin is. Instead of the preciousness of Jesus, we have the odiousness of sin. In the burnt offering, inasmuch as it is Christ Himself offered to, and accepted by, God, we have everything done that could possibly make manifest what He was, in every respect. In the sin offering, because it is sin, as judged by God, the very reverse is the case. All this is so plain as to need no effort of the mind to understand it. It naturally flows out of the distinctive character of the type.

\* \* \* "Thus, the intrinsic excellency of Christ is not omitted, even in the sin offering. The fat burnt upon the altar is the apt expression of the divine appreciation of the preciousness of Christ's Person, no matter what place He might, in perfect grace, take, on our behalf, or in our stead ; He was made sin for us, and the sin offering is the divinely-appointed shadow of Him, in this respect. But, inasmuch as it was the Lord Jesus Christ, God's elect, His Holy One, His pure, His spotless, His eternal Son, that was made sin, therefore the fat of the sin offering was burnt upon the altar, as a proper material for that fire which was the impressive exhibition of divine holiness.

"But, even in this very point, we see what a contrast there is between the sin offering and the burnt offering. In the case of the latter, it was not merely the fat, but the whole sacrifice that was burnt upon the altar, because it was Christ, without any question of sin-bearing whatever. In the case of the former, there was nothing but the fat to be burnt upon the altar, because it was a question of sin-bearing, though Christ was the sin-bearer. The divine glories of Christ's Person shine out, even from amid the darkest shadow of that cursed tree to which He consented to be nailed as a curse for us. The hatefulness of that with which, in the exercise of divine love, He connected His blessed Person, on the cross, could not prevent the sweet odor of His preciousness from ascending to the throne of God."

The quotation has been made at length, because, in no other way, could so good an idea be given of the method and spirit of a kind of interpretation of Old Testament passages which is, at the present time, only too common. This sort of typological interpretation has an attraction for many minds, because of its seeming religiousness, and because it appears like the result of a deep spiritual insight into the meaning of the Word of God. Of such interpretation the book cited is full, as are other commentaries by the same author. The same kind of interpretation is common in many somewhat popular books, appears in the sermons of some noted preachers of our day, and is not unknown in some Bible conventions or Bible schools, or other gatherings for Bible-study. It is important, therefore, to examine this method of interpretation, and to determine its real character. From a study of the example given above, we may learn of all.

We seek, first of all, for the central and determining principle. This is given us in the context of the quotation already made :

"We know there is nothing in the Word of God without its own specific meaning; and every intelligent and careful student of Scripture will notice the above points of difference; and, when he notices them, he will, naturally, seek to ascertain their real import. *Ignorance* of this import there may be; but *indifference* to it there should not. In any section of inspiration, but especially one so rich as that which lies before us, to pass over a single point, would be to offer dishonor to the Divine Author, and to deprive our own souls of much profit. We should hang over the most minute details, either to adore God's wisdom in them, or to confess our own ignorance of them. To pass them by, in a spirit of indifference, is to imply that the Holy Ghost has taken the trouble to write what we do not deem worthy of the desire to understand. This is what no right-minded Christian would presume to think. If the Spirit, in writing upon the ordinance of the sin offering, has omitted the various rites above alluded to—rites which get a prominent place in the ordinance of the burnt offering, there must, assuredly, be some good reason for, and some important meaning in, His doing so. These we should seek to apprehend; and, no doubt, they arise out of the special design of the divine mind in each offering."

All this can mean only two things: (1) the purpose of the Spirit, in the case of the details of the Jewish ritual, can never end with the details themselves; but (2) each of these details must have its own typical meaning. It is also virtually said in the words of our author, although not quite so formally and plainly, (3) that their typical meaning must be determined as the judgment, or rather the conjectures, of the interpreter may best avail to settle it.

These three principles are always present in all interpretation of this kind. The third would doubtless be rejected in theory, but it is adopted in practice. The first and the second could not be given up without abandoning the method altogether. And so these are formally or virtually admitted as well as followed.

Yet these two principles are the purest assumptions, for which there is no warrant either in reason or in the Word of God, no basis either scientific or scriptural. Moreover, in practice, they lead to erroneous and absurd consequences, as is clear from the example we have selected. These consequences may be classified under two heads:

(1) They lead to an ignoring of the plain statements of the Scripture itself, as this must be interpreted according to a sound Hermeneutics.

In speaking of the burnt offering, the author remarks, in another passage: "The idea of sin-bearing—the imputation of sin—the wrath of God, does not appear in the burnt offering." This, indeed, he must say to be consistent. But is such a statement consistent with the evident meaning of the Scripture language? What possible reason can be found in either the language employed, or the nature of the facts set forth, for supposing that the imposition of hands, the sprinkling of the blood, and the burning with fire, indicate one symbolical or typical meaning in the case of the burnt offering (Lev. 1:3–9), and another and different meaning in the case of the sin offering (Lev. 4). Or, when it is said of the burnt offering, "It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev. 1:4), and of the sin offering, "The priest shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savour unto the Lord; and the priest shall make atonement for him" (Lev. 4:31), what is there to indicate that the atonement in one case is different in kind or value from the atonement in the other? But, if the atonement is not itself different in value or in kind, there can certainly be no different typical meaning. To be sure, the author says on this point, "True, we read, 'it shall be accepted for him, to make

*atonement* for him ;' but, then, it is 'atonement' not according to the depths and enormity of human guilt, but according to the perfection of Christ's surrender of Himself to God, and the intensity of God's delight in Christ. This gives us the very loftiest idea of atonement." This statement is not altogether clear. But how can any very lofty idea of atonement, even of an atonement "according to the perfection of Christ's surrender of Himself to God," whatever that may mean, fail to comprehend, as one of its elements, either the conception of sin-bearing, or of the wrath of God ?

Again, the sin offering is made the type of Christ as the sin-bearer, "to shadow forth what Christ became for us," notwithstanding the fact that it is distinctly stated in the passage in Leviticus that the sin offering is only to be made in the case of sins unwittingly committed. Touching this, our author says, "We need to understand that sin has been atoned for, according to God's measurement thereof—that the claims of His throne have been perfectly answered, that sin, as seen in the light of His inflexible holiness, has been divinely judged. This is what gives settled peace to the soul. A full atonement has been made for the believer's sins of ignorance, as well as for his known sins." But, according to Leviticus, there was to be no sin offering for "known" or wilful sins. The type must mean, then, if it is to set forth Christ as the sin-bearer, that he bore our sins of ignorance alone, and made no atonement for our sins in which we so long and so obstinately consciously persisted. In his devotion to his theory, the author seems to have forgotten, or to have failed to see altogether, that it was for sins of ignorance alone, and not for these in addition to the known and wilful sins, that sin offerings might be made.

Finally, the idea which is made by our author possibly more decisive than any other in determining the real meaning of the burnt offering, is not in the passage in Leviticus at all.

Speaking of Lev. 1:3, our author says :

"The use of the word '*voluntary*,' here, brings out, with great clearness, the grand idea in the burnt offering. \* \* \* The blessed Lord Jesus could not, with strict propriety, be represented as *willing* to be 'made sin'—*willing* to endure the wrath of God, and the hiding of His countenance ; and, in this one fact, we learn, in the clearest manner, that the *burnt offering does not foreshadow Christ, on the cross, bearing sin*, but Christ on the cross, accomplishing the will of God."

It is, however, most unfortunate that this "grand idea in the burnt offering" should depend for "clearness" in its presentation on a term which has in reality no existence. Neither this word "voluntary," nor the idea it expresses, occurs in the passage under consideration, as a reference to the Hebrew will show, or as may be seen by consulting the text in the Revised Version.

(2) But there is still another class of consequences which follows the use of this false typical method of interpretation. These consequences are included in the fact that this method makes it possible, and even demands, that different interpreters should find different typical meanings in the same type. A method which thus, of necessity, puts a doubtful, or a double, a triple, or a quadruple meaning on the Word of God, commends itself neither to scholarship nor to spirituality. As a matter of fact the typical import is established, as is clear from the examples given above, not by sound Hermeneutical principles, or even by generalizations from scriptural instances, but by the application of certain subjective ideas of analogy to the types in question. These ideas of analogy, more-

over, are the product of the interpreter's notions of what Revelation and the plan of God ought to be, or must be, and not deductions or inductions from what the structure and character of Scripture are shown really to be, by a careful study of the Bible itself. By what principle, or with what justice, then, can one man, who makes his own subjective ideas of analogy the law of his interpretation, forbid the same liberty to another? How could our author, for example, reasonably object, if the writer should proceed to point out the true typical import of the burnt offering and the sin offering somewhat as follows:

The burnt offering, to which, by the laying on of hands, the sinner's guilt was transferred, is, in its death, the type of Christ the sin-bearer dying as our substitute. But the sin offering, which was only to be made in the case of sins unwittingly committed, became the sinner's substitute not as standing for him as willfully guilty, but only as weak and erring. This sacrifice, in its death, therefore, was the type of Christ dying as the one who bore in himself all our infirmities, our sicknesses, and our mortality, and opening, by his death, the way to release from all our infirmities and our mortality. As our substitute, he paid the debt of nature, and brought into our world a resurrection into immortal life. How beautifully harmonizes with these different meanings the different disposition that was made of the body of the victim in each case. The burnt offering was all consumed upon the altar; for the Christ, who has paid the penalty, the full penalty, of sin, and they who die in Him, need not fear or hesitate to come boldly into the presence of God's holiness. There is no barrier to full and perfect acceptance by a holy God. But as the representative and the substitute of a weak and dying race filled with infirmity, even Christ cannot come to be fully and perfectly accepted by the Father, until all the weakness and infirmity of this race shall cease, and death itself shall die. To be sure, as His only and holy Son, Christ is always precious to the Father, and this is shown by the burning of the fat, the choicest part of the victim, upon the altar. But all the victim cannot come to the altar. This teaches us what is the great grace of our Lord in that he, by coming among us, has, in his love for us, deferred the day of his full acceptance by the Father to the time when we, with Him, shall enter into the immortal life of the resurrection, and He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.

More might be written of like sort; but it would be but a waste of time.

The falsity of all typological interpretation of this kind will be all the more apparent if we determine what is the fundamental principle that must underlie a true interpretation of the types of the Old Testament, and what are the laws that must govern us in this interpretation. This determination must be the subject of the next paper.